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ABSTRACT

A guide for authors of correspondence course units is presented to aid staff and consultants who will develop a correspondence cum residential course in curriculum development at the Kenya Institute of Education. The guide is based on observations at the Open University at Milton Keynes. The following areas are considered: the contribution of consultants, the length and level of the correspondence text, objectives of the text, activities and self-assessment questions within the text, types of readings specified in correspondence texts, tutor marked assignments and final examinations, and stages of production of course units at the Open University. The following stages of production are described: synopsis, draft I, draft II, faculty editing, developmental testing, external assessment, draft III, faculty editing, and handover. Additional matters include galley proofs, deadlines, text references, copyright issues, illustrations, and format and style. (SW)

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A GUIDE FOR AUTHORS OF COURSE UNITS

A REPORT OF SOME EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The following observations are based on a visit to the Open University (OU) at Milton Keynes in October 1977 . Quite clearly, the experience of the OU is relevant for many other attempts at introducing distance learning systems at advanced levels. The following arises out of the acquired insights at the Open University and is intended as an input for the deliberations of the African Curriculum Organization which in cooperation with DSE and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation/GTZ proposes to establish a correspondence cum residential course in curriculum development at the Kenya Institute of Education. This presentation is a mixture of a description of relevant points which were observed at the Open University in connection with the writing of correspondence course units and of points relating directly to the proposed CCRC to be organized by ACO/DSE/GTZ, at Nairobi.

As is well known, the Open University operates a multi media teaching system for students who wish to study part-time at home on their own. This particular experience is of great relevance for the correspondence course to be organized with resident staff and consultants, on behalf of ACO, by the Kenya Institute of Education. The courses at the Open University are developed by course teams in consultation with outside specialists in the particular field of education. Consultants are invited to contribute to certain parts of the course and their ideas on the overall design of the course are welcomed. Apart from the course team which bears the main responsibility for the establishment of the text, consultants have an important role to play in the preparation of text materials.

NATURE OF CONTRIBUTION

The contract of a consultant within the course will specify exactly what sort of contribution he is asked to make. In most cases it will be to provide materials that will form parts of correspondence texts to be sent out to participants in the course. These texts are the major element in the course. The contribution of individual consultants will vary in length depending on the element of study time allocated to that particular field of work.

Associated with each unit or block of texts may be various supplementary materials. These may include assignments (later to be marked by the tutors), student activities, project booklets and tutorial notes. As these will in the course of the actual correspondence course have to accompany your particular correspondence text the consultants or authors help and suggestions may be sought for their contents. The course as a whole will be edited by the course team and by particular editors in charge.

CORRESPONDENCE TEXTS

The correspondence texts are designed to give the maximum help to the student learning by himself at his place of work or at home. This situation requires an approach from authors that may well be radically different from conventional academic texts. As far as possible the OU is aiming at producing the written equivalent to tutorial interaction. A correspondence text therefore is not just an exposition where an author is mainly concerned with presenting his arguments which the students must learn and remember, but it should also encourage the student to perform his own analysis, to formulate his arguments and apply what he has learnt. We cannot assume that students will do this unless the correspondence text is designed with appropriate opportunities built in, not merely tacked on at the end.

Thus the correspondence text may differ from a pamphlet, a paper and a chapter in a book in that it is designed as a learning text. It may even resemble a mixture of a work-book, source materials, comments, discussion, exposition, etc. and it will normally contain special features such as objectives and activities to help students learn. It must always be remembered that with these correspondence materials the correspondence text writers should establish some kind of connection and communication with their readers.

LENGTH AND LEVEL OF CORRESPONDENCE TEXT

The available study time determines the length of a correspondence text. At the Open University, this includes time spent on components other than the text that can be roughly calculated as follows:
TV and Radio (including notes): approx. one hour.
Assignments (tutor marked) approx. one hour.

Thus at the Open University, consultants should calculate the time available for a unit text as seven hours. This includes time allowances for

the correspondence text
readings (in text, set books or reprints)
activities.

Authors at the OU are requested to estimate the time each activity and set reading will take and write this into the text e.g.
"allow about ten minutes for this activity"
"allow about thirty minutes for this activity"

These times and the time taken on the text as a whole are difficult to estimate but estimates can be revised after development testing. (When the unit are worked and commented on by a group of experimental "students").

The follwing rough estimates of the times that should be allowed for those typs of readings has been established by the OU on the basis of data from the first years education studies students:

Correspondence texts: 3000 words per hour
Set reading:
a) of every difficulty (e.g. Denis Lawton): 6000 words p.h.
b) of great ease (e.g. John Holt) 12000 words p.h.

At the Open University correspondence texts are usually the major unit component and require fairly intensive study. Set reading can usually be read at a faster rate. Obviously there is an enormous variation in the rates at which particular correspondence texts and set readings can be read. So concultants should consider the nature of the material in their units carefully before making time allocation. The reading notes given above are a rough guide to help in this. For example if a correspondence text has a maximum length of 15.000 words one should assume that studying it will take 5 hours. One will then know that one has two hours to allocate to activities (timed seperately in the text and set reading).

In the experience of the Open University there is a severe limit to the number of major points that can be put over in a single section. Consultants and authors are propably well advised to limit themselves to a few major themes which they elaborate and in some cases it may not by possible to take on more than one complex theme.

The time allocation for the various components of a unit in the Open University is given to students in Notes on Reading and Working Order . These notes are designed to guide students in organizing the work on the unit. Consultants and authors make suggestions about the order or manner in which students might best tackle the reading in this notes.

OBJECTIVES

At the Open University a page at the beginning of the correspondence text is set aside to specify the objectives of the text. When properly specified these are helpful to the students. They are also important for designing assignments and examination questions. Where appropriate they may be written in behavioural terms to tell students what they should be able to do by the end of the text. The aims of authors and consultants in writing the text should be incorporated into the introduction.

ACTIVITIES AND SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The emphasis on activities in Open University teaching materials is marked. They occur in the body of text. They normally consist of a question or questions upon which the student is expected to write notes or a brief essay type answer. They are normally accompanied by guidance as to the material to be drawn on, the essential points to be borne in mind and the time to be taken. The timing is incorporated in the overall timing for the work on the correspondence text. There are no formal arrangements for answers to self assessment questions or activities to be discussed with the tutor, so there is no reason why students should not be encouraged to talk over points arising from the activity or self assessement question with both tutors or fellow students.

At the Open University, there is no particular "norm" for the appropriate number of selfassessement questions or activities within the correspondence text for a unit. They are provided as a service to the students, with the intention of guiding him and helping him to pass and recapitulate his work as he progresses through the unit. The answers to self assessement questions on activities do not enter into the university's assessment and examination of the student.

Consultants and authors are asked to write any self assessment questions and activities they think appropriate into the early drafts of the correspondence text for their units.

READINGS

There are three types of readings specified in correspondence texts:

a) Set reading. This consists of articles sent out in correspondence packages or specified parts from Readers which students are expected to read as part of their work on the units. It is included in the time allocation for the unit and assessment questions can be asked on it.

b) Recommended Reading. This consists of additional readings from readers and set books which students are directed to read if they wish to pursue a topic further (no assessment).

c) Further reading. These are recommendations for students wishing to pursue a particular topic in depth. The university circularises libraries with lists of such books to encourage libraries get them in stock for Open University students. - A similar procedure might be applied with the provision for national curriculum centres of particular books for the participants in the Nairobi correspondence-cum-residential course.

When consultants or authors set reading, students should be told when during their work on the unit they should read it. Authors and consultants should explain in the text why they have set it and what they are expecting students to get out of it. Authors may wish to set activity round it.

Articles and excerpts from books which consultants and authors wish to set are at the Open University included in the course reader. Alternatives at the Open University for including set reading in the course are reprints in the unit text or supplementary materials, all as off-prints inserted in the correspondence package by themselves or in folders of material. Since reprints and off-prints are costly in termy of copyright fees and printing it is desirable to include as much set reading as possible from course readers and set books.

ASSESSMENTS

Course assessments at the Open University are of two kinds:

1) Continuous assessment, consisting of tutor marked assignments
2) Final examinat[illegible]

Tutor marked assignment 9

Tutor marked assignments (TMA's) are relativly few number and

spaced fairly evenly through any course.

The students are normally given a choice of questions for each TMA. In respect of each question set for a TMA there must also be provided a Suggested Approach to the Assignment (normally a paragraph or two indicating the principal material to be drawn on and the main issue to be borne in mind); and also Tutors Notes where necessary to assist the Tutor in marking the TMA.

Students are normally told in writing the general criteria that will be used in assessing the tutor marked assignment, and given some general guidance as to the appropriate length (normally between one and three thousand words).

Each TMA (and the written guidance associated with it) is printed and posted as part of one of the booklets of supplementary materials sent to the students periodically during the course.

Authors at the Open University should bear in mind that it is university practise to change TMA's from year to year, though the questions in successive years may cover similar ground.

In preparing the early drafts of units authors are asked to suggest what, if any, part of material could appropriately be assessed for a TMA question, and to give one or two examples of such questions, with Tutor Notes to guide the tutor in his marking.

EXAMINATIONS

All students at the Open University are required to sit examination papers at the end of the course. For most 1/2 credit courses this takes the form of a three hour paper. Scripts are marked by script markers, drawn drawn from among the tutors, and supervising coordinated by members of the course team, normally full-time central or regional members of the academic staff.

Papers may include questions in a wide variety of forms, from conventional essays taking up an hour or so, to very short answers. There may be a very wide or a closely constrained choice. Formal

examination papers are set by the Examination Board (comprising course team members and at least two external examiners). However, their work will be greatly assisted if, at an early stage in course planning and production clear decisions are made as to what parts of the course are suitable for examination in the final paper, and through what type of questions.

Authors are therefore asked to indicate this in the correspondence text they are preparing and to add, if appropriate, suggested drafts of examinations questions.

The authors of correspondence texts for units who are not full time university staff are not expected to have a continuing responsibility for TMA's and examinations during the four or more years of life of a course at the Open University. They are being asked to contribute proposals in order that a reasonably rational pattern may be established as part of the overall production of course materials. Self-assessment questions and activities, on the other hand, form an integral part of each correspondence text (which is normally printed only once and used throughout the life of the course).
It is intended therefore, that the course team should consider, from the first, unit drafts which incorporate self-assessment questions and activities, if appropriate.

STAGES OF PRODUCTION

At the Open University course units usually go through the following stages of production:

Synopsis
Draft I (DI)
Draft II (DII)
Faculty Editing
Developmental Testing
External assessement
Draft III (DIII)
Faculty Editing
Handover

Galley Proofs
Page Proofs

The various stages of production are described below. Each one of them is usually followed by a course team meeting.

Synopsis

The author sends in notes on proposed content, activities and approach. Objectives, set and recommended reading, suggestions for assessment can be included at this stage if desired. Synopses are circulated and discussed at the next course team meeting. At the course team meeting comments are made from course team members and communicated to the author.

Draft I

The author works on his own ideas and those of the course team and produces the draft, following OU format and style. Activities should be worked out at this stage, if possible, but ideas can be put forward for discussion.
Any necessary articles which are needed to appear are supplied fully referenced at this stage. Any diagramm, tables, etc. are as far as possible to be included in place in the text.
Any additional material that is associated with the text should also be sent in.

Draft II

The author revises the first draft on the basis of discussion with the course team. He may incorporate new material and activities. He checks that the activities are fully worked out and that the instructions are quite clear.
The author submits his revised draft which is then prepared by members of the course team for developmental testing and external assessment. This is the first time the text has a wider circulation than the course team so it must be as complete and well-presented as possible.

Developmental testing

The draft is developmentally tested by volunteers. This is normally

carried out by the course team but authors might well wish to be involved with this. For the Nairobi course, this could best take place at the KIE. After the developmental testers have worked through the text and have written comments they meet as a group to discuss their reactions with the author and/or some members of the course team. The course may be developmentally tested by some students who will be given a credit on completion. Because of this developmental testing for credit situations it is essential that the course is presented in as complete a form as possible.

External assessment

At the same time the draft is sent to the external assessor of the course for his comments. After this stage there is another course team meeting which discusses the comments from course team members, external assessor and developmental testers.

Draft III

The final draft is prepared for handover taking into account comments from external assessors and the developmental testers. There is again a course team meeting discussing comments from course team members.

Handover

The manuscript incorporating all final points is handed to the course team editor for editing.

Galley proofs

At this stage corrections (at the OU) cost £ 1.50 a line. Page proofs are really intended to check that the spacing is all right once the galley have been "paged" and that any corrections have been made. Authors of courses receive galley and page proofs. At both galley and page proof stage the editor checks the proofs for printers errors of type-setting spacing and consistency as well as reading against the manuscript to ensure accuracy. The author is not responsible for this sort of checking.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEADLINES

It is very important that materials come in by the deadlines that authors agree to. At the Open University everybody knows that there is a very tight shcedule in order to get the three drafts typed, circulated and discussed. Also there is provision for developmental testers lined up for certain dates and of course for the final handover date to publishing which can not be postponed, if the material is to be mailed to the students on time.

OTHER EDITORAL MATTERS

At the Open University authors are asked to take note of various points having to do with editorial matters.
These include references where it is stressed that it is important to note down in a list of references at the end of the unit the full reference of any book mentioned, that is

the author's name and initials,
the date of publication in brackets,
the title of the book underlined,
or in the case of an article the title in single inverted commas;
the publisher and the place of publication and the page numbers if specified;
The original date of publication plus date of latest revised edition making sure that the addition of the references is recorded if it is not the latest one.

It is also important to put down the page numbers of any sort of materials as well as the reference. It is important to indicate if a book or paper is in the author's possession so that it can be easily checked. Also a paper may be in the unit author's possession but exists nowhere else in the country.

COPYRIGHT

Copyright has to be applied for on all diagramms, table illus-

trations and excerpts of over 400 words taken from printed material.
Authors should take photocopies of quoted material wherever possible and supply complete references as described above.
A word count should also be given.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Suggestions for illustrations and graphics from course unit authors are invaluable. They are requested to put forward a list of suggested illustrations with the drafts. The Open University photography unit and design studio is able to make photographs and drawings according to authors' specifications. Authors are requested to make their suggestions as early as possible as well as to give an indication of suitable captions to the material. Suggestions for illustrations for unit covers are also particularly welcome.

FORMAT AND STYLE

The course team editor at the OU will see that the material will conform with OU house style. However if there is any particular spacing or layout which authors would like to have they should let the course team know preferably before proof stage.

USE OF OTHER MEDIA

For the purposes of this paper a discussion of media utilization at the OU was committed.